Caccia

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Caccia

by CReed

Summary

The night they married, Doctor Hannibal Lecter surprised Will Graham with tickets to Italy.

A present to his husband. A show of devotion. An opportunity they once more could share.

The last time they partook in such an occasion, they were half in shadows—hiding until the moment their secrets could no longer be kept from one another. Now, they were equals and Hannibal was no longer working alone behind the curtain. He would never have to again.

The wounded wolf who found his way to him was ready to hunt once more and Hannibal could not wait to bear witness to the carnage.

Notes

Hey, everyone! Has it been a year! Shortly after I posted the ending of *Identical to the Ideal*, I became very ill. I've been on the mend since and finally completely healed in July. I've been pretty weak and have slowly built my typing skills back up. As well as my creative process. This story, and a few others, have been something I've been tinkering with for months and I hope everyone who pops by enjoys it. I wrote this before the previous story in this series, *The Final Goodbye*, but thought it would be better to post this after. Something sweet to follow the bitter, if you will.

Please enjoy, dear readers.

Important note: I'm not sure if this needs to be said, but just to be safe: this is a companion piece to *Mr. Lecter* and *Identical to the Ideal*. This might be a tad confusing or lackluster if you aren't familiar with the overall story. I'm sure it can be read as a stand-alone, though.

See the end of the work for more notes

Caccia

“I can't stress enough how wrong it feels to have flown overseas and not bring any bags.”

“And I told you, many times, that everything we will need for our stay has been taken care of.”

“That doesn't change the fact that traveling with nothing is weird. I know you have the monopoly on Eccentric Rich European Man, but this feels extravagant, even for you.”

“You know very well that I am aware of how you were living before we met. You are no stranger to traveling light. And we aren't traveling with nothing; we each have a carry-on.”

“That was out of necessity, not whimsy. And you know that's not what I mean.”

“I have every intention of buying us new wardrobes, amongst other things, while we're here. Trust me, you'll thank me when we don't have to pack up twice as much luggage when we leave.”

“You're ridiculous.”

“Perhaps, but it sounds like I won this round.”

Will chuckled and shook his head as Hannibal smiled and kissed the knuckles of the hand he had held for the entire length of the drive from the airport to their apartment. A six and a half-hour flight, followed by a near four-hour car ride. It had been at night, technically early morning, when they left their family and wedding reception behind in Lithuania. Now, it was a late, golden morning in Florence.

The driver who picked them up at the airport slowed until the car pulled to a stop. Will leaned over Hannibal to look at the building looming above them. He knew their apartment was on the top floor, but nothing else of where they would be staying, and craned his head back to gaze at the windows facing the street. Curious eyes swept the face of the building, taking in the gray stone and carved embellishments.

“It's beautiful.”

Hannibal couldn't help the small laugh that escaped him at Will's awed exclamation. He let his eyes follow where Will's wandered, taking in the exposed brick on the three-storey building. Weathered and worn but standing, even after a hundred years and many more. He skimmed his smile along Will's throat, reveling in the way he shuddered against him.

“Wait until you see the inside.”

* * * * *

It was too early in the day to retire, no matter how exhausted they felt. But it was also too late in the day to fully enjoy what the city had to offer. Hannibal left Will to his own devices

while he executed the only other option available to them—get settled into their home in Florence.

While Will explored, and more likely than not called Mischa to check on Katinka and Mira, Hannibal first made sure his instructions for their arrival were followed exactly. The sets of keys to the vehicles he bought were left inside an envelope on a coffee table in their living room, as requested. The car and motorcycle they belonged to were safely tucked away in the garage connected to the building. A pair of cell phones were awaiting activation beside the keys. A briefcase filled with everything Hannibal asked for sat unassuming to the side, locked and ready for his perusal at his convenience.

He was happy to find the refrigerator stocked with everything he had listed for the housekeeper to purchase. To shake off the remaining drowsiness that clung to him, he spent the afternoon preparing their first meal. Something to tempt Will's appetite but nothing too heavy. A perfect way to welcome them to Italy, and all Hannibal wished to show him.

As a bottle of Azienda Agricola Valentini Rosé chilled and Hannibal put the finishing touches onto the olive wood serving board, a voice drifted into the kitchen behind him.

“There are marble columns in the living room. And frescoes on the ceilings.”

“We *are* in Florence.”

At the sound of a scoff, Hannibal turned to find Will leaning against the doorway watching him. Unable to do anything else but come to him, Hannibal abandoned the dish he had worked so painstakingly on. When he was within reach, Will pulled him closer with a tug to his belt. Hannibal tracked the movement of calloused hands as they smoothed across the material of his vest. Nimble fingers toyed with the buttons but they did not unclasp them.

“Count Lecter, in his decadent Italian hideaway. Do you actually own the building, or just this floor?” Will teased as his grip tightened for just a moment on Hannibal's tie before releasing him.

Hannibal's smile mirrored Will's and for a moment they both seemed to contemplate leaving the food for other pursuits. Instead, he contented himself for the time being with a kiss before pulling Will further into the kitchen. An unspoken request for him to help set the table.

“I have a few properties in Italy,” he said. They were both fully aware that he didn't answer Will's question.

Will didn't take the bait, instead grabbing up the bread dish to take into the dining room. By the time Hannibal came in bearing the serving board, the rosé was breathing and Will was seated at a table set with white lace and fragrant blossoms of gardenias, roses, calla lilies and tulips. Unlike most of the apartment that was furnished in shades of cream and painted in eggshell blue with white marble trimmings, the dining room was darker, warmer. A yellow wash on the walls. Accents of gold and black walnut. Above them was a fresco that stretched the length of the paneled ceiling.

A heavenly scene of plump cherubs flittering across a cloud-filled blue sky. While angels and saints looked down on them. Hannibal only wished he had something other than beef to serve as they watched with mournful doe eyes.

“Carpaccio,” Hannibal supplied to Will's curious stare at what he served and sat down to join him. “Accompanied by capers, onions, Parmesan and canary melon.”

“Shaped like a bird's wing?” Will looked closely at their meal. Translucent slices of raw frozen beef pounded thin and drizzled in olive oil and lemon juice, spotted with capers. Artfully arranged to appear like feathers. Additional plumage consisted of sweet and fragrant strips of red onion, buttery ribbons of Parmesan cheese and pale yellow flesh of sliced melon. There came a small smile to Will's lips which grew at Hannibal's questioning look. “I'm constantly left in a sort of limbo at your table. I'm torn between a want to stare and admire all the little details for hours, and an insatiable urge to devour every single morsel till there's nothing left behind.”

Hannibal had yet to sip his wine or taste the fruits of his labor. His eyes had not yet had their fill of curls of shifting shades of carob and sepia made slightly frizzy from hours of travel. Eyes, though tired, that resembled the color of snowstorms in this lighting held far more interest to him than any succulent cut or rare liquor could hope to garner. “Likewise.”

Will watched as Hannibal plucked a piece of beef from the board to gently roll up and encase some of the onion, melon and shaving of Parmesan within. He bit into it, savoring the sweetness with the acidity. The underlying punch of salt and iron. Will mimicked his preparation, taking a testing bite of the meat. He followed it with a sip of wine. Only after Will bit into the crispy edge of the tomato and basil focaccia did he react, smiling at Hannibal as he swallowed.

“This is wonderful. I don't know how you managed to do all this, but it's delicious.”

Hannibal shrugged but couldn't help preening at the praise. “I had everything on-hand. Focaccia doesn't require too much effort to put together. All one needs is patience, and time for the dough to properly rise,” he generously admitted as he prepared another bite.

“Your stamina is terrifying.” Will took a long pull from his glass, sighing as he swallowed the chilled wine. Hannibal wondered if Will picked up on the pink raspberries and vanilla, Summer sweetness, cherries and bonbons. “I'm ready to fall down where I'm at.”

Thoughts of Will's palate, the tongue upon which the wine teased, were gently pushed aside for a later consideration as Hannibal leaned close to refresh his husband's glass. “I can teach you ways to build yours up.”

He watched as pupils dilated, as snow cloud eyes shifted to gunmetal blue. “I'm hopeful for your first lesson soon,” Will said before sharp teeth tore into tender meat.

Hannibal had to kiss him. He waited long enough to set the wine aside, for Will to swallow his bite, before reaching out to cup Will's flushed cheeks. Lemon and salt. Iron and cherries. He nipped and sucked at Will's mouth as if finally taking a sip of water, a bite of food, after years of isolation and starvation. Greedy, grasping hands clawed at the silken material of his

vest, straining the fine threads and most likely ruining the weave of it. Hannibal delighted in the sounds of ripping cloth and pulled Will from his seat and into his arms as he stood.

“Soon,” Hannibal promised as he dragged Will from the table.

They abandoned their meal. The meat would spoil and the wine would turn a syrupy, cloying mess. None of that mattered to Hannibal. What care had he for such trifles when he had Will?

While Hannibal spent hours preparing dinner, Will explored the vast apartment. He, apparently, staked his claim on a bedroom at the far end and had everything unpacked and put away exactly where he wanted. Not the largest, nor the most impressively decorated, but it had a breathtaking view of the duomo. The scent of the potted citron and bergamot trees wafted in from the furnished balcony. As the day drifted closer to evening, the sun ignited the blues and creamy whites of the room in a wash of fiery orange.

It was there Will led him.

“Not so tired and worn as you claim.” Hannibal's laughter was muffled by kisses, broken only by quick and rough movements that yanked him free of clothes until they both were naked and falling onto the bed after a hard shove from Will.

A glint of gold against silk sheets had Hannibal's bruising grip around wrists relaxing to shift his hold, fingers sliding to lock with Will's. Their wedding bands were warmed from flesh and gleaming from newness. He swore he could feel the etching across the precious metal, branching and bracketing antlers, embedding into his skin as Will clung tighter to him. Would that he could have it branded on his body. Another mark from Will he would proudly wear.

The city below and around them was readying for the night. Musicians and singers on street corners. Vendors peddling their wares. The clatter and bustle of nearby cafes and restaurants preparing to entice the hungry. Sounds of pedestrians and traffic could not drown out the sound of their lovemaking. Harsh pants of breath against glistening muscles. Demands and pleading moaned into the air between them. Everything else was empty, needless noise in the background.

A groan of pain escaped him as Will's nails scored deep lines down his back. It was the teeth in Hannibal's shoulder that brought him to agonizing completion. Hannibal kissed the blood from Will's lips as Will shuddered in his arms. Will's head fell back, lips smeared red and cobalt eyes vacant, as he let their ecstasy overwhelm him. Hannibal kissed along his throat, pressing his fingers harder into the marks that were sure to darken at Will's hips.

Hannibal followed where Will's unseeing gaze had wandered and he smiled, teeth pressed lovingly against the vulnerable carotid artery.

A heavenly scene of blue skies and rosy-cheeked cherubs. A senate of angels and saints watched on, audience to their love. Dark eyes full of sadness, as if privy to the sins they joyfully committed. Bearing witness to the sins they planned to commit.

Hannibal hoped they enjoyed the coming show.

* * * * *

Hannibal didn't make it a habit of buying the meals he consumed ready and made by hands other than his own. Rarely did he patron restaurants. He enjoyed the acts of foraging and searching for the best ingredients. Hunting for the perfect cut of meat so often transcended to an act of the sacred. An intimate ritual. Cooking was a respite and a privilege for him that he honestly enjoyed. Had enjoyed since boyhood. It was the same with baking. To create something living that would be taken into himself for his own life, to share the life-giving essence with others. The processes of cookery were meticulous and artistic and rewarding.

However, he didn't find himself in Florence often.

He left Will, warm and safe and deliciously exhausted, behind in their bed to search for a suitable breakfast. A favored bakery of Hannibal's a few blocks from their apartment came to mind and he had agonized for longer than he ought to have over the selection. How was he to choose what to bring his beloved when everything on display tempted his growing hunger?

Golden brioche. Sugar-dusted cornetti. Fresh and empty cannoli waiting to be filled with whatever one wished. Hannibal paused in his search, eyes falling on dainty layers of pastry. Sfogliatelle. Some were bursting with sweet cream and candied orange peel while others held a silky lemon custard. Only a few were left that had a decadent chocolate filling with sour black cherries overflowing the crisp edges. They were the shape of a seashell and Hannibal smiled as he ordered a box of several each, reminded of the Ežerinis awaiting his return.

The scent of rich, dark coffee met him when he stepped through their front door, letting him know Will was up and about. He didn't have far to look to find him.

“Good morning, Will.”

Will looked up from the book he was reading and smiled. Once more, Hannibal was stopped in every sense as he took in the sight that greeted him. Will had found the coffee maker. A full coffee tray was placed on the table near the couch in the parlor Will sat on in his robe, as he apparently couldn't be bothered to dress for the day just yet. Sprawled on, to be more precise. Lazy and languid and so lovely it could drive Hannibal mad.

An unimpressed glare at Hannibal's ogling was preceded by, “Tell me you brought me food.”

“I brought you food.”

Will chuckled as he made room for Hannibal to sit beside him. He poured him a cup of coffee as Hannibal opened the box to reveal his offering. Will picked a chocolate cherry pastry first.

Half-way through his second, this time with a sinful little hum as he bit into a lemon custard shell, Will nodded towards the cell phones that had been pushed aside to make room for the silver tray. “I didn't activate them. My Italian isn't up to the task.”

It was said as if in apology, which Hannibal swiftly disregarded. “I'll see to it after breakfast. Don't push yourself. The way your wonderful mind works, you'll be fluent in no time. Just like your Romanian and Lithuanian.”

“I'm *passable* with those.” Will smiled even as he shrugged off the praise. “It has more to do with my memory than any kind of aptitude for languages you seem convinced I have.”

“Agree to disagree.”

Will laughed at him as he reached into the box for another pastry. “In the meantime, I'm glad the landline accepts international calling.”

“How is Katinka?” Hannibal teased.

“Sleeping, being spoiled when she isn't. Robertus and Murasaki are still making crazy plans for the trip they want to take her on. Mira caught a squirrel in the backyard. Mischa sends her love.”

“And the world hasn't ended with them out of your sight.”

“Whatever. You miss her too,” Will accused, ignoring all etiquette and napkins and entirely unrepentant as he licked flaky pastry and cream from his shining lips.

“I do, terribly. However, it would be a lie to say I am not thoroughly enjoying having you to myself.”

Hannibal's hand shot out, fingers wrapping around the fine bones of Will's wrist. Before Will could guess at his motives, question the abrupt capture of his hand, he pulled him closer. Hannibal licked the cream from Will's fingertips. Somehow, the vanilla and orange was more pronounced when sucked from Will's fair skin. He chased the taste to Will's lips, suddenly ravenous.

It was an odd feeling, being driven by such primal lust and insatiable hunger. Still, after all this time, Hannibal found himself in the thrall of a powerful need for Will. There was a time when he thought it would fade. The luster of something new might wear off, returning him to the careful, reserved, *in control* man he was. He was a fool to have believed he would ever get his fill.

What was an even more odd phenomenon was that Hannibal didn't mind.

For Will—his mind, his body, his soul—Hannibal would happily give up all that he was. If only for just another taste. Just one more moment in his presence. How quickly his resolve always crumbled whenever Will simply breathed in the same room as him.

“Not that I would mind,” Will managed between kisses, playfully tugging at the buttons of Hannibal's waistcoat but going no further in any attempt to divest him, “but did you have something planned for the day, other than what we're currently doing? If so, tell me now. Before I keep you in bed all day.”

And it was only because of Will that he would reign himself in. In another life—different versions of them—they had the luxury of doing nothing but indulge in one another. Some other universe had them simply playing house in Italy, enjoying their honeymoon. A newly married couple, in love and amorous and addicted to one another. But not in this life. The

both of them excelled in living half in and out of shadow. There were many reasons why Hannibal chose this city, this season, to take Will to for their honeymoon and it was time to enact everything he had carefully orchestrated.

For Will. For them both.

Hannibal pulled away after one last kiss. “There is something I planned.”

Will watched as he stood, straightening his jacket and smoothing his hair back into place. Hannibal took his time clearing a space on the coffee table before leaving to retrieve the briefcase left for him. Will didn't move from his seat, didn't question further, but his curiosity grew as Hannibal unlocked the case. Inside was an unmarked black dossier. It was thinner than Hannibal expected, but the contents were priceless.

He set the folder on the table before Will and left him to discover what lay within as he gathered the remains of their breakfast.

With the dishes drying and the leftovers put away, Hannibal returned to the silent living room. Will sat slumped against the arm of the couch, chin cradled in his palm. Blue-gray eyes stared out at the beautiful sunny day beyond the window but they did not see it. The dossier had been tossed back onto the table, photos spilling out to spread across the polished surface. Faces of two men, whom Hannibal had found out the names and personal information of, peeked out from loose pages.

Hannibal knelt between Will's feet, hands placed reverently on his thighs, and merely waited. Will didn't acknowledge him, lost in memories filled with blood and pain. As despondent as the day they met.

“There really is no free will. Choice, merely an illusion we comfort ourselves with.” Will's quiet musing finally broke the silence.

“Everything is predetermined.” Hannibal massaged the tense muscles beneath his hands in soothing circles.

“Before we're born. Before we're even a concept. Our lives are mapped out to the smallest detail.”

Hannibal took in everything that made up Will in that moment. Unshed tears gave a note of saline to his scent. Remorse was sticky-sweet to Hannibal's senses. Will's anger was ash on Hannibal's tongue. Beneath that, the spicy notes of an elusive *something*. Not quite Epiphany but a very close cousin. Recognition.

“You know these men.”

“I do.” Will finally looked at him, a small deprecating smile tilting his mouth into an unhappy grimace. “A few years ago, when I worked for White Collar, I helped investigate a man suspected of—among other things—money laundering and human trafficking.”

Hannibal nodded, giving Will his undivided attention even though they both knew this story. And how it ended. “Mason Verger.”

“Mason wasn't only untouchable because of his family and money, but because of the guards that circled him and Margot continuously like vultures. They were like anything else Mason kept close. Possessions. Trinkets he could brag about. In the handful of encounters I had actual conversations with him, he always brought up Carlo. On the outside, he and his brother Matteo were personal bodyguards.”

“And on the inside,” Hannibal asked as his fingertips drew spiraling designs across Will's thighs.

“I'm sure Mason grudgingly would have used the term 'right-hand man' for Carlo, if pressed. Enforcers that carried out every one of Mason's whims. Informants who tattled on Margot's every action. But, really, they were his part-time handlers. They advised him on certain business matters best left off official books.”

Hannibal remembered them from the reports detailing the carnage Will left behind in West Virginia. Remarkable only because they died by Will's capable hands. “How did two Sardinian brothers end up in the employment of a country piglet?”

“They were on-loan, in a way. Mason had his filthy hands in many pies, foreign and domestic. The real contact Mason worked with was a cousin of theirs. He sent Carlo and Matteo to Mason. Ànghelu Sanna.”

“And he and *his* cousin, Frantziscu Gallo, run various businesses throughout Italy. Many, I am sure, are not as wholesome as they appear on paper. So, they were not just incompetent thugs scrambling after the promise of money, but grieving family making rash decisions when they decided to collect on Mason's bounty in such a reckless display of impatience in Lithuania.” Hannibal had to make an effort to relax his grip on Will. He rested his forehead against Will's knee, taking in a deep breath to calm his growing anger. “I find myself once more surprised by you, Will. Even I could never imagine the connections tied to you.”

“A tangled web we weave...” A gentle hand settled in his hair, idly toying with the strands to ruin the style. “Twisting and flowing through space and time until finally overlapping into a knot of inevitability.”

Hannibal lifted his head to gaze once more at Will. The sum of everything his life equaled. The culmination of his being. “Fate and Circumstance composed a series of events that led me straight to you.”

“Put into motion so long ago, it would be impossible to trace back the first domino that fell. It would be useless to try.” Slowly, hesitating—as if he was unsure of his welcome—Will reached out to lay his hand against Hannibal's cheek. His thumb smoothed over Hannibal's cheekbone as a tear slid down his own. “It had to be Nigel.”

It was always going to be Nigel. In this life. Perhaps, in every one of them. Destiny's sticky tendril's looped around Nigel to connect them. No matter the choices they thought they had.

Doomed. Meant to be. It was all the same. Hannibal kissed Will's tears away. His lips trailed down along Will's throat, past the opening of his robe, to rest against his beating heart.

Hannibal made quick work of the knot in Will's sash that kept his robe closed. He parted the folds of warm material and slid his hands down along Will's sides, counting ribs as he went. A trim waist led to sculpted hips. It was there he paused his explorations to grip the firm flesh and tug forward. The position reclined Will back into the cushions as he perched on the edge of his seat.

It gave Hannibal the perfect view of Will's scar. The only one left that still looked fresh. Still looked exquisitely painful. A scar that would never completely fade. He traced the jagged line across Will's abdomen, silently reciting the muscles it bisected, the nerves it severed. His hand flattened against the firm expanse and pressed the slightest bit, just to feel the strength of Will beneath his palm.

Hannibal leaned down to kiss where he touched. His lips followed the raised seam. Evidence of Will's encounter with Death, his survival. A mark left behind after being gutted by something large and terrible. The same something that killed Nigel.

An injury dealt by proxy from two Sardinians who would not see them coming.

Hannibal rose only to pull Will into his arms. His wolf came willingly, clinging to him as he regained his moorings. “Are you ready for your first lesson in hunting, Will?” He whispered against silky curls.

“Yes.” Will's reply was immediate but just as softly spoken into the quiet of their morning.

* * * * *

The way Will practically threw himself into the ornate metal chair outside the restaurant would convince any passers-by that he was exhausted. As if Hannibal had forced him through the Pallazo Vecchio and Ufizzi Gallery all in one day. The reality was that they had enjoyed a few hours of light sightseeing and some mild shopping—by Hannibal's standards—and it was still early in the afternoon.

The trunk of their car had plenty of room left.

However, it wasn't as if Hannibal didn't enjoy Will's brand of dramatics and thoroughly appreciated the view of his husband slouched in repose, like a cat in a beam of warm sunlight, sharing a bottle of Chianti between them. And though Will was never a fan of crowds, he played the role of tourist with perfection. One would never guess that even as they enjoyed a lunch of bistecca Fiorentina and tagliatelle funghi porcini e tartufo that they had ulterior motives for this outing. It was with purpose that this particular restaurant on this specific street at this exact time was chosen and Will never lost sight of his goal.

Hannibal cut into his steak and savored the sight of Will sopping up blood and olive oil from his own plate with a piece of bread. He washed the taste of rich rare beef and black pepper away with the delicate blend of violets, strawberries and tobacco from the wine. He smiled as Will subtly glanced across the street, to a nondescript building down an alley.

“Everyone, every day, wanders into multiple places and situations where they could vanish without a trace.”

“With observation, one could notice every one of those situations.” Will sounded as if he found the idea intriguing, though disagreeable to his personal preference.

Hannibal shrugged as he took another bite. “And in the waiting, a hunter can find out many useful things.

“Such as?” Will stole a slice of black truffle from his pasta to spear with a piece of steak. He sounded doubtful.

“When a hunter stalks, it is to find out everything they can about their prey. What they do during the day. When they go to bed. Who they go to bed with. Is their home secluded? Or, perhaps, is it a posh apartment in the middle of a lively city? What is the overall security surrounding the quarry?”

Will looked up from his plate and smiled at him. “I appreciate your dedication, your attention to detail, but I think I'm too impatient for the long hunt. Endurance hunting.” Another forkful past lips now stained pink from the juicy meat. “Trailing behind, till the prey tires and can be snatched up by tearing claws and a hungry maw.”

Hannibal poured them both more wine. “Is it so dissimilar to what you do? Waiting for your catch to bite the enticing lure?”

“I don't chase,” Will said as he lifted his glass to watch the sunlight shine through the dark red. “I like it when they come to me. It is a heady, powerful, feeling—to know they are so entirely predictable. That all I have to do is flash my feathers, give them the scent of what they want above all else, and they'll leave their routines and their safety and come right to me. Exactly when I want them to.”

Hannibal reached across the table for Will's free hand, turning it over to trace his Fate and Heart lines. “Dancing on your wire, unaware of the trap. Right up until they feel the hook in their mouth.” He kissed his palm. “Was it your plan, then, what happened in West Virginia?” A test and a tease asked against Will's knuckles.

Will chuckled and tilted his glass toward Hannibal in salute. “I said 'I'm too impatient for the long hunt.'” Movement across the street caught his sharp attention and Will glanced toward the alley once more. Frantziscu Gallo stepped out of the building, done with his business there. As he always was in the afternoons. He wandered down the street to the next step in his routine with the gait of a man perfectly content with his place in life, secure in the power he held. Unaware of the gaze of a hunter locked on his every move. “Though, I am a fan of a good ambush.”

Hannibal hummed, equally due to the perfectly prepared meat in his mouth and the image in his mind of Will falling upon an unsuspecting fool. “It is a shame, that I have not had the pleasure of witnessing that side of you.” Thus far, Hannibal had only the aftermath of Will's frenzy to admire.

Will laughed and leaned forward, strong forearms resting against the table. The sweet breeze played gently with his curls. Boyish and charming and absolutely misleading. “I could say the same about you. Shall we make a game of it?”

“A game of hunting?”

“I show you. You show me.” Will's smile grew into a teasing little grin, fingers playing across the crystal stem of his glass. “Do you suppose you could win me over to the more meticulous, theatrical, method you're so fond of?”

“I thought this was to be your first lesson in more sophisticated hunting, Will.”

“What better way to learn than to compare and contrast? To learn through demonstration?”

Deviation to the hunt, of any kind, was something Hannibal did not allow for. Not like this. There was always an element of improvisation and adaptation, but to change plans so much? That was usually only in an emergency. Will, of course, knew this and enjoyed poking and toying with Hannibal whenever possible. It was intoxicating, being the focus of Will's playfulness and Hannibal knew he would give in to every one of his desires. He was also too curious to see what Will would do to deny him.

“A wager, then. And what is the prize?”

“Control of our next trip, of course. Complete control.”

Hannibal sealed the deal with a kiss, uncaring of where they were or who was around. It was a temptation to lose, to let Will win and have his way. Just to see where his whims would take them. No plans. No reason. There was also the ever-present urge to perform. To show Will what he was capable of without even trying. And it was exhilarating to be undecided on how he wanted their game to end.

The rest of their meal was exquisite. The company even more so. When they finished, Hannibal paid the bill and Will set his sunglasses back into place before they continued on in a leisurely pace down the street in the direction of Signor Gallo.

* * * * *

Fans of murder mysteries, writers, outsiders looking in—all were under the impression that the act of killing had to be a convoluted scheme. Full of drama and twists and, sadly, red herrings. And while theatrics and symbolism had their place and enjoyment, Hannibal would never deny, it all mostly came down to opportunity and luck and simplicity. At least, to those who excelled at it.

Plotting and planning and motive were all well and good, but it meant nothing if one got caught. If the prey escaped. There didn't have to always be an elaborate and drawn-out scheme. A diabolical trap. Will, as he said, was far too impatient for such things. At the moment, Hannibal was far too impatient to see Will work to fret.

Gallo was first.

They tailed the man long enough so that when Will saw an opportunity, he took it. Frantziscu was winding down his day. No more pressing matters to hold his attention. He was a few steps away from his car, in a parking lot with no security cameras focused on it and no one else around, when Will came fast and silent behind him. The knock to Frantziscu's head wasn't fatal, but Hannibal didn't worry about him rousing any time soon, either. The mixture of potent sedatives Hannibal gave him would ensure it.

Quick and relatively painless. No blood. No trace of the man or his car. Frantziscu's trail would seemingly vanish to the untrained eye. It all took less than thirty minutes. Admirable and impressive, to work so ruthlessly yet efficiently.

Ànghelu Sanna called for something with a little more flair, Hannibal decided.

Sanna's wife was on a romantic holiday with a lover in Nice. All three children were away at boarding schools and college. A shame. Hannibal made do with a lone guard at the entrance gate of Sanna's villa. His liver and kidneys were ready for immediate removal.

“Careful, darling.”

“I told you, it'd be better if you did this. I'll ruin the meat.”

“Nonsense. You're doing wonderfully.” Hannibal kissed the side of Will's neck, laying a hand over Will's to steady the scalpel.

Will scoffed but his hand was stable, grip as sure as Hannibal's ever was. “Keep doing that and dinner will be late.”

Will was a quick study and took in everything Hannibal told him with a voracious curiosity. With every incision. Every drop of blood. As Hannibal removed the fragile liver. Will only watched avidly, asked questions here and there. Participated as readily as he did when dismembering Mason Verger.

“Do you need help with anything else,” Will asked once they finished and removed the gloves he wore to dispose of properly later.

“Only if you wish to sous-chef.”

Hannibal watched as Will looked down at the body of the nameless man on the kitchen floor, splayed and bled out on a sheet of plastic, between them. Whatever his empathy told him, what he gleaned of the man and his life prematurely ended, wasn't enough for him to feel sympathy. Hannibal could only sense a terrible calm in his wolf. And a deep satisfaction for obliterating something belonging to the man he still hunted.

“I'll leave that to you, Doctor. In the meantime, I'll clean all this up and set the table for our guest of honor.”

Hannibal snagged him around the waist on his way out and kissed Will until his breathing came harsh and hungry. “If I could reverse time to the night I proposed, just so I could ask you to marry me once more, I would.”

“*Command* me to marry you, you mean?”

“Semantics.”

Will laughed before kissing him again, ending it with a warning bite to Hannibal's tongue. “Quit distracting me.”

Unfortunately, they were on a tight schedule so he let Will go with a sigh.

The recipe Hannibal had in mind would take no time at all to prepare. Simple and elegant and clean. Flavorful and aromatic. While Will took the remains away and selected the finest plates for the table, Hannibal cleaned the liver and sliced it thin before coating it lightly in herbs and flour. He sautéed sweet white onions and the meat while a dish of potatoes, garlic and citrons roasted in the oven.

“I can almost taste the butter.”

Hannibal smiled as arms wrapped around him from behind. Warm breath tickled his ear but he kept stirring the contents of the pan. “Now who is distracting whom?”

There were no table runners. No centerpieces. An absence of fragrant flowers made for a lonely setting. Only the light from a few candles in the middle of the table gave any sort of ambiance to the meal. The rest of the dining room was dimly lit, almost in darkness. Hannibal sipped the Barolo he liberated from the well-stocked cellar. Notes of licorice and blood orange flooded his palate and he made note to acquire more of the vintage.

The front door opening could just be heard from where he sat and a man's voice called out for Frantziscu. Gallo's car was left parked outside. Will's idea. Hannibal continued eating. Footsteps grew louder as they made their way to the dining room. Following the flickering lights. Following the scent.

The smile on the man's face froze, slipping away as he discovered a stranger at his table in place of the welcoming family he expected. Ànghelu noticed nothing else, most importantly not the second plate of food beside Hannibal's that was unfinished.

“Buonasera,” Hannibal said into the tense silence just as Will materialized from the shadows behind Ànghelu to plunge a syringe into his neck. Unerringly into the vein Hannibal had earlier instructed him to.

* * * * *

As much as Will loved to tease, Hannibal kept the ownership of property to a minimum. Even under aliases and controlled through third and fourth parties—he believed in leaving as little of a trail behind as possible. Nothing to trace back to him was a philosophy which served him well over the years.

While he wasn't the owner, he knew of countless places to hide. Places that were private. Forgotten corners. Hiding in plain sight and easily looked over. Perfect for what he did out of the view of polite society.

It was to such a place where Hannibal took Will and their spoils. The outskirts of the city. In the lonely hills of the forgotten places in Florence. As Hannibal finished preparing for what all they might need, Will explored the abandoned building. A few lanterns were set up to fill the large, empty room with a warm glow. His steps echoed off the concrete floor to the rafters above. The flap of wings overhead sounded into the darkness as they disturbed some night hunter's routine.

“What was this warehouse used for?” Will wandered back over, careful not to step on the plastic sheeting Hannibal was laying out.

“It has changed many hands, held many functions, over the years. Nothing ever stayed for long. At one time, it had been part of a slaughterhouse. Remnants of a paddock and barn can be found if you hike down the hill to the east.”

“You've been here before.”

“Many times.” Hannibal smiled as he checked the ties around their guests, testing the stability of the chairs they were slumped in. He turned to make sure they had everything ready, laid out in a neat row for their convenience on a small table to the side. Knives, scalpels, hammers, saws, syringes and chemicals. Whatever they might need. A warm pressure settled between his shoulders and he hummed in appreciation as Will's hand, encased in supple black leather, slid up along his spine and neck to card gentle fingers through his hair.

“Is this where you first started to perfect your hunting skills?”

Hannibal turned, hands settling at Will's waist beneath his black peacoat. A gloved hand came to rest against Hannibal's throat. “Yes. When I came to Italy to attend university, I was presented with an opportunity that had always been absent before then. The occasion led to many more.”

“You were so young,” Will all but cooed, charmed by the idea. “Just a boy.”

“It was here that I became a man.”

Hannibal could see the moment Will went inside himself, imagining the child Hannibal once was. A quiet, dreamy, whimsical little boy. A doting brother. A brilliant student. A knack for anatomy and medicine and healing. A ravenous hunger that only grew stronger with each passing year. No matter what it fed on. It had always been there, and it would always remain. No matter what Hannibal did.

Better to indulge, then. Accept himself. Perfect the ways in which he hunted then let it control and consume him.

Did Will see his evolution? The caterpillar and the pupa? That which hatched forth to wreak havoc every chance it could and enjoy every moment of the chaos? Did Will see every face of every dull pig? Ugly and useless until they graced Hannibal's table?

Will stepped closer, pulling him down until their lips brushed as he asked, “What did the first bite taste like? The first forkful that wasn't prepared out of necessity, but for pleasure?”

“Bracing.”

Golden light illuminated the cold warehouse. Fireflies danced in the shadows around them. Hannibal held Will tight as they kissed in the lonely quiet. In his rush to have him, Will's sharp teeth split Hannibal's lip. Will tasted of sweet wine and blood. His touches were soothing and comforting, even as he savored Hannibal's cut. Cruel and loving. Giving even as he took everything from Hannibal.

Absolutely sublime.

A pained groan, and the aborted shuffling of limbs tied firmly in place, broke the spell Hannibal and Will found themselves under. Will turned to the other men in the room, keeping himself between them and Hannibal. Ànghelu's head lolled back against his chair as his dazed mind tried to make sense of its surroundings. Only when he looked to the side, when he noticed Frantziscu slumped over and bleeding, did he begin to realize what kind of situation he was in.

Will's footsteps brought Ànghelu further into coherent awareness and he watched as Will slowly crossed the room to crouch at his eye level. The effects of the drugs were wearing off, but there was no recognition in the older man's eyes. He listened as Will spoke softly, asking if he remembered him. Will's Italian was perfect, his accent was Hannibal's.

When Ànghelu shook his head Will chuckled. “No wonder you failed so spectacularly at capturing me, if you forgot me so easily.”

Gone was the accent, the Italian slipping like water off Will's tongue. The only thing left was English in a raspy American voice. Hannibal wondered if it was just him who picked up on the subtle Southern drawl that crept its way into Will's teasing. Either way, something must have registered in Ànghelu's memory. There came a widening of dark eyes. Surprise. A tremor in his jaw and a slight waiver to his voice. Ànghelu couldn't help the small reflexive reaction of fear at seeing Will, but there was still anger roiling beneath everything else.

“Will Graham.” Ànghelu spat at Will's feet, a string of curses following. He pulled at his restraints just to feel how little they gave before relenting. “You look well. Considering.”

“Took a while, but I healed after your nasty surprise in Lithuania.” Will nodded in agreement.

Ànghelu didn't smile, didn't sneer. There would be no bargaining or threats from him. Merciless eyes looked over Will's form, cataloging and making note of what they could see, calculating what they couldn't. “An eye for an eye, is it, Signor Graham?”

Will stood and stepped away. Hannibal could hear the sweet, teasing smile in his voice when he said, “If I was after an eye for an eye, I would find your wives, your children, everyone around them at the moment I found them—and do my best to make them unrecognizable to those who had the misfortune of finding them. That's what I would do, if I was after an eye for an eye.”

Ànghelu spared Frantziscu a glance, giving away neither concern nor fear as he looked over his business partner and family, before turning once more to Will. “So, it's not revenge. What do you want? The contract is over. We lost. You escaped.”

“You made this personal. I killed your family. You killed some of mine. Now we kill you. Full circle.”

At Ànghelu's confusion, Hannibal stepped forward to drape himself along Will's back. He rested his chin on his shoulder as he looked at the bound men. Purposely, he slipped an arm around Will's waist. His wedding ring shone even in the dim light. Will's hand came to settle over his, now bare of gloves. Their rings a perfect match. Hannibal reveled in the shock and horror that filled Ànghelu's eyes, no small amount of disgust chasing after.

Hannibal chuckled and said, “Your actions brought Will to me, which allowed for us all to meet.”

“Your 'actions' got his brother killed.” Will lifted his hand to caress Hannibal's cheek, smiling as he kissed his palm. “I guess you could say this is revenge. At least, a little bit. In the spirit of reciprocity, we decided to pay you and yours a visit.”

Hannibal left Will to stand before their prey. He had thought over this moment often. Whenever he relived identifying Nigel's mangled body. The times he soothed Katinka's tears. The last time he placed flowers at Gabriela's grave. Every kiss, every touch, every word from Will. Hannibal thought frequently of the men responsible for the twist of fate his life had traveled along since their foolish meddling.

He considered them now. A few years younger than Robertus. Vicious and cruel men. Powerful and terrifying. A nightmare for so many who crossed their paths. And yet, what good was their power and resources, their connections and savagery, now that they found themselves in Hannibal's sights? What hope had they now?

“Ànghelu,” Hannibal murmured the name in consideration as inspiration came to tickle the back of his mind. “A saint and a nameless angel.” He stepped over to the other man, unconscious from the knock Will gave him and the drugs that were still flowing through his bloodstream. “Frantziscu—one who later received the stigmata.” Hannibal smiled at Ànghelu. “Shall we see if the marks of Christ are enough to wake our sleeping friend?”

Will came to stand beside him, smile growing as he looked at the man in question. He turned to Hannibal and passed him not a hammer and iron nails but a gleaming scalpel. “Only after you teach me how to take the best cuts again.”

Hannibal bypassed the blade held out to him to pull Will into his arms. He whispered praises, promises and every vow he could think of between the kisses he pressed to Will's curls, his brow, his lips. “Anything. Everything you want, is my privilege to give you.” Hannibal held him tighter. “Of course, I will teach you. I have such incredible things to teach you, Will.”

“This won't ever stop.” Ànghelu's voice broke the moment between them. They both turned to him, smiles a mirror of each other's amusement as Ànghelu finally tried to make his

threats. “You think this will end when I'm gone? This won't be forgotten. This won't ever end for you.”

“I certainly hope not,” Hannibal said as he kissed the back of Will's hand before taking the offered scalpel. He came to stand before Frantziscu once more, having trouble deciding where to begin. He turned to Will. “Crucifixion often began with a crown of thorns. Shall I start at the head, as well?” Will smiled and nodded towards the bound men, giving Hannibal wordless permission to enact his vision any way he wished.

And that was when it all became truly horrifying for Ànghelu Sanna.

* * * * *

The next day, Hannibal showed Will more of Florence.

They explored the city, Hannibal pointing out where he once lived and studied. The places he used to frequent. Countless afternoons and even more nights spent in blissful solitude. Quiet contemplation amidst the art and music and everything else which helped shape who he would become. Without Nigel and Mischa. Without his uncle and aunt to watch over him. The last vestiges of boyhood that had clung to him fell away as he stalked these streets all those years ago.

Will absorbed everything Hannibal shared, curious and hungry for every tidbit. His image of Hannibal was fleshing out. Soon he would know him as intimately as his own self. If he didn't already. Beneath their skin, Hannibal had the most profound feeling that they were one. And it was with promises to return, to give a more thorough tour later, that Hannibal pulled Will from his past to enjoy their present.

After a morning of history and culture and gazing upon architectural splendor, Hannibal dragged Will to all the finest shops. One couldn't come to Italy and not experience the fashion. Between the boutiques and the tailors, the jewelers and the cobblers, Will bought every tacky bauble and trinket that a tourist could ever want. The more kitschy, the more insistent Will became. For every dashing piece of clothing or accessory Hannibal selected, Will managed to sniff out another hideous shirt, knickknack or keychain.

He did get much more genuinely enthusiastic when Hannibal started browsing for Katinka.

Hannibal found Will looking over a collection of dresses. Tiny and lovely. Soft silks beneath fine lace. Ruffles of taffeta that would swallow her up. While Hannibal immediately began to mentally put together ensembles and decide what accessories would best match, Will seemed to be caught between choices. He felt the material of one, fingers gentle across the shining fabric before going back to the previous dress. Comparing the softness.

Hannibal wrapped an arm around Will's waist as he came to join the inspection. “Why not get her all of them?”

Will scoffed and shook his head. “Where would Bell even wear these? I can think of one occasion and she'll already be too big for these, the next time it comes around.”

“I can think of several occasions, without trying. In the very near future.”

Will's smile became something warm and tender. A wistful sort of melancholy came over him. He took his time smoothing over the fabric. “It's a sweet kind of ache—being here with you, while being away from her.”

Hannibal leaned close to kiss Will's temple, lips reverent as they touched the edge of the scar hidden beneath dark curls. “Shall we collect her?” Will turned away from his browsing with the slightest pull, falling easily into Hannibal's hold. “Bring Katinka to this city? Make memories with her?”

A flash of want tempered by propriety, and a restraint honed over long and lonely years, flashed in the depths of Will's eyes. Eyes like a stormy sea today. “What about Mischa? Robertus and Murasaki? I can't just take her away from them.”

“That doesn't sound like a 'no.'”

“They've planned their time with her for months.”

“And they will have their turn.” Hannibal cupped his face, drawing him close enough to kiss. “They will go on their trips and take her to their events. Everything they wanted to do, they will. But after? The moment they check the last item of their itinerary off the list, we'll send for her. And we will be together again.”

A troubled frown marred Will's once serenely beautiful face. “Will we still be here by the time they're done?”

“Are we on a schedule I am not aware of?”

Will laughed, dragging him close for a kiss. It was a wondrous thing, Will's want. He yearned for so much and always expected to go without. Always *settled*, and dared not ask for more. A habit Hannibal was slowly breaking him of.

“Say 'yes,' Will. Ask me. Tell me what you wish, and I'll make it so.” Hannibal teased the answer he desired out of his husband with a few more coaxing kisses.

A charming flush warmed Will, even to the tips of his ears. But the thought of anyone seeing them, of blatantly ordering Hannibal, wasn't enough to dim his blinding smile or smother his desires. “Yes. I want Bell with us.”

Hannibal's lips lingered once more on Will's forehead as he held him for just another moment longer. “Then it will be done.”

Their outing lasted the entire day. Hours spent together. Buying gifts for their family. And now planning further for when Katinka joined them. They returned to their apartment in the late afternoon, Will feigning exhaustion from the shopping.

Plenty of time to marinate the meat.

Most game needed such a thing. To tenderize and bring out the best flavors. White wine, vinegar, spices and herbs all made for a more succulent cut. Even the toughest meat could be transformed with the right brine.

He didn't let Will help.

It was harder than Hannibal thought, keeping everything a surprise. However, there were a myriad of interests to keep Will occupied—and out of the kitchen. By the time Hannibal prepared the vegetables and browned the meat, kept it simmering for nearly an hour, Will managed to stash everything they bought, checked up on Katinka and decided the table setting. The latter a punishment for his banishment, Hannibal was sure.

Hannibal set two plates onto a dining table adorned with ivory lace and bouquets of roses, heather and lilies. Red wax from the candles dripped down antique holders, a drop or two of crimson on white. Will poured the wine as Hannibal joined him at the table for dinner.

“Coniglio in agrodulce, served on Gorgonzola polenta,” Hannibal introduced the main course.

A furrowed brow, a pout of lips, as Will puzzled out the Italian. “*Bittersweet rabbit*?”

Hannibal smiled, endlessly pleased with Will's growing vocabulary and understanding of his mother's tongue. He picked up knife and fork each by their ornate silver handles. “Or, one can say, 'sweet and sour rabbit.' The marinated game is browned and then simmered in a sauce made of wine and vinegar, fruits and berries; nuts and root vegetables. And a bitter dark chocolate.”

Will looked down at his plate for a moment. Not in disgust or apprehension. A small ritual in and of itself. Understanding of what was on the plate. Acceptance. Anticipation of participating in the profane. The sacred and divine. Hannibal couldn't look away, waited with bated breath, as Will took in what was placed before him. Another offering. Another tribute.

He cut into the meat. Golden brown skin covering flesh cooked to perfection. Knowing what it was, *who* it was, Will took the meat off the fork tines with a reverent bite. Only after Will began did Hannibal sample his own. Will's eyelids fluttered, almost closing, as the flavors washed over him.

“Bellissimo,” Will said, licking a smear of sauce from his bottom lip. “I've never had rabbit that tasted so delicious before.”

“Grazie.” Hannibal chased a bite with a sip of wine, tease of a smile hidden behind crystal. “Does that mean I won our little wager?”

Will's laughter was as full of smoke and darkness as the chocolate Hannibal had chosen for the dish. “Do *you* think you won?”

“I always win.” That earned Hannibal another, richer laugh.

“When it comes to us, I don't think there can ever be a clear winner.”

“Then, we are in a zero-sum game.”

Will leaned close, smile blinding. Candleflame reflecting off dark curls like burnished copper, igniting in midnight eyes. A wild and feral god, come to claim Hannibal's soul. “That might be the case, Doctor Lecter, but don't you wanna keep playing?”

* * * * *

A week went by. Then another. Time spent in exploration and experimentation. Hunting all the while, picking off the stragglers of Sanna's pack that had injured theirs so grievously until there was nothing left of those who were responsible, no one left to remember Will and the bounty that once marked him. A hazy, dreamy sort of happiness enshrouded Hannibal. The likes of which he had never known, never thought he could feel. He loathed the day it would end.

But, then, why should it?

One early morning, Hannibal lured Will from their bed to the back of his Triumph Thruxton. Though he was curious, Will saved his questions. As if he could feel the weight to the day, the pregnant silence not yet revealing what the hours ahead would hold for them. It was chilly when they left their apartment but their leather jackets were more than enough protection.

With the motorcycle, the miles disappeared quickly behind them. Hours from the beating heart of Florence, the buzzing of her pulsing hive. The farthest Hannibal took them thus far. Will clung to him the entirety of their journey. A pleasing weight and warmth against him. A welcomed presence as Hannibal drove to a place he had only been once before then. As if he had always been with him.

A winding road weaved through hills and over streams, beyond vineyards grown twisted and wild. It all led up to a weathered villa. Empty and lonely. Long abandoned for more pleasing pursuits. Watching and waiting for wayward caretakers to return.

Here they stopped. Helmets and jackets shed to sprawl across a blanket packed for just such a purpose. Beneath a grove of ancient olive trees, gazing up through gnarled branches at a sky of saffron and rose, they ate the breakfast Hannibal had prepared for them.

Will sipped his coffee, nibbled his schiacciata all'uva, and made a study of Hannibal. An indolent beauty, gazing at him from across a picnic spread, with eyes far sharper than his relaxed pose would suggest. He didn't ask where they were or why they were there. Instead, he asked, “Where was your mother, and her side of your family, from?”

Hannibal drowned his smile in his own swallow of coffee, elation rushing through his veins as surely as the caffeine. Will's wondrous mind made connections so fast that even Will couldn't constantly keep up with it. Hannibal adored him even more for it. “All over Italy. Milan, mostly.”

“An old bloodline. As old as the roots that attach you to Lithuania.”

Hannibal nodded and poured them both more steaming coffee from the thermos. “The blood of my family on my mother's side runs deep in this earth.” He looked about them, at the dark woods threatening to overtake them and the ruins of an estate behind them. “I wonder how different I would be, had we been raised here instead.”

Will smiled, sharp and secret, the breeze playing with his curls. “Not too different.”

Hannibal leaned over to kiss him before placing a few more slices of the freshly made prosciutto and goat cheese on Will's plate to compliment the bread. “No. Not too different.”

After breakfast, they took a walk. If there had ever been trails in the surrounding forest, they were taken by brush and overgrowth long ago. It gave way to hills that overlooked the lands nearby. The city proper could just be seen in the distance. When they had their fill of the breathtaking skyline, Hannibal led them into the villa itself.

Some of the smaller buildings were beginning to collapse. Weather and time doing much to destroy what was abandoned. The main house was in better condition. They managed to climb the spiraling staircases without falling through the floors. Though, the holes in the roof didn't make for much of a victory. There was evidence of nesting animals and mold. Nowhere was unscathed by neglect. But the bones of the place held such vast promise, the surrounding land beautiful and full of endless potential.

That was really all that mattered.

Hannibal pulled Will away from the stonework of the cavernous walls of the basement he had been admiring to twine their hands together. Shafts of sunlight fell through gaping cracks in the mortar. More than enough to see by. Enough to see that Will was enchanted by the place. History and old ghosts seemed to emanate from every corner. Hannibal wondered what they whispered to Will.

“What is this place,” Will finally asked.

“It's mine.” Hannibal traced the delicate skin of Will's wrists with gentle fingertips, delighting in the pulse he found there. “Well, it was my mother's. Now it belongs to me, because Nigel and Mischa never wanted it. It's for you, Will.” Will sputtered for a moment, shocked into speechlessness. It was endearing and far too amusing. Hannibal had to raise his hands to kiss his knuckles as Will gathered his senses once more.

“What, exactly, am I supposed to do with an *Italian villa*, Hannibal?”

Hannibal shrugged, entirely unconcerned as he continued kissing Will's captured hands. “Sell it. Burn it to the ground. Though, I was hoping you would wish to renovate it and live here.”

“But—We can't—What about—” More sputtering and an adorable squeak escaped Will as Hannibal relinquished his hands only to wrap his arms around him in a tight hold. “Don't we already have a house? Cottage? Whatever you called that mansion next-door to Mischa? What about Vilnius?! I thought your plan was moving to Vilnius to open a psychiatry practice!” He sounded on the verge of hysteria.

Hannibal hummed in agreement, nuzzling the tender skin between Will's neck and shoulder, kissing there before leaning away just far enough to look him in the eye. “That was the plan. It was *my* plan. Before Nigel died. Before I became Katinka's father. I made those decisions before I met you, Will.”

“You can't just throw all that out the window!”

“You will find there is very little I can't do, once I've set my mind on something.”

“I can't ask you to dismantle your life brick by brick. Not for me.” It was said in a hushed breath, tears thick in every consonant.

Hannibal kissed him before any more denials could fall from those tempting lips. What a ridiculous notion. Did Will truly not know? “I would leave my life behind me in tatters, if only to please you. The interests I pursued before you seem so dull now.”

“What would you do here?”

“Anything,” was Hannibal's immediate response. He kissed Will again and in between his words. “Everything. I've tried medicine. I could always find minds to heal here. Perhaps something new? Academia always calls to me. Shall I try my hand as a scholar?”

“Professor Lecter?” Will's smile was radiant.

“And while I decide? In the between, when we're not hunting and putting on a grand show? I will take care of you and Katinka. This will be our home. Yours and mine, Will. Raising our daughter here.”

“And Mira?”

“Was there ever a doubt?”

Will gave his consent with a kiss. In so giving, something fell into place inside Hannibal. A strange rush of certainty. As if it was always going to end here. Supposed to end here. A warm and addictive kind of finality. A period at the end of a sentence. So something new could begin. They held onto one another for a moment more, basking in the growing potential surrounding them.

“What now,” Will asked, voice muffled against Hannibal's shoulder as he held tight to him.

Hannibal rested his cheek against the top of Will's head, kissing wild curls and inhaling the scent of his husband, who was perfectly content and at peace in his arms. “Whatever you wish.”

End

End Notes

A few things:

First, *caccia* is “hunting” in Italian. Also, it is a part of a song in canon form, portraying the hunt or village scenes and usually employs sounds like the cries of beggars, vendors and the barks of dogs. I thought that was all appropriate for what was happening here and I hope I managed to invoke some of that in the story.

Second, I didn't want to go into a lot of explicit detail in the revenge scenes. That's not really the point of this story. Seriously, my notes for the overall vibe of the story were, “It's their honeymoon. Keep it romantic and disgustingly sweet. Also murder.” :) I hope I accomplished this and no one stopping by was too terribly disappointed that I kept the torture to a minimum.

Third, I was playing around with a lot of different ideas for this story. One thing I kept coming back to was the idea of this being what all Florence could have been in Season 2/3. Hannibal and Will, bashing around Europe, being openly romantic and murderous—it could have been insane. I wanted to explore that. They are officially Murder Husbands, after all. :)

Fourth, I really love that I never managed to write Hannibal as a psychiatrist this entire time. :D It wasn't really my intention. At first, it was because he was far too busy plotting and seducing Will to expend too much effort on starting a practice. And then, as I wrote this short story, I started thinking about all the different versions of Hannibal. This could have easily been his life. I like to think of him as a professor or working at the Capponi. Perhaps, not the curator this go around, but still charming and dazzling everyone with his lectures and poetic recitations? With Will beside him? I don't know, I just really love the idea and thought to leave a little suggestion of that behind. :D

And finally, this is the last installment before I start delving into the AU of the AU. That's right. In my convalescence, I did manage to think of a coherent plot exploring a what if of Nigel and Gabi surviving. Well, mostly coherent. And mostly finished in the outline. It's completely different than *Mr. Lecter* and *Identical to the Ideal*. So, if you're interested in that you should stay tuned.

I hope everyone who stopped by enjoyed this. It was a lot of fun to write. Until next time!

Stay safe, sane and healthy, dear readers!
~Creed

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